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# Extension Programs in Home Economics



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*Prepared by  
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Cooperative Extension educational programs in home economics help families learn new skills and obtain new knowledge for better living. Programs include information on managing a household; providing nutritious, safe, and appetizing meals; managing available resources, including money and energy; planning and caring for clothing; improving personal and community relationships; and providing an attractive, safe, and healthy home environment.

These programs are available to people of all income levels—in rural, suburban, and urban communities. The programs are conducted by staffs and Extension volunteers in 3,150 counties and cities of the United States, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and Guam.

Nearly 30 million direct teaching contacts are made by Extension home economists each year. Millions more people benefit from Extension information provided through mass media.



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## The History

Extension home economics programs have been reaching people with useful information since 1914, when passage of the Smith-Lever Act led to establishment of the Cooperative Extension Service system. The legislation provided for a unique partnership of Federal (U.S. Department of Agriculture), State (land-grant universities), and local (county, parish, district, or city) governments in jointly funded programs.

Before 1914, States throughout the South and Midwest offered educational programs on building “fireless cookers,” home sanitation, canning, sewing, home beautification, and other activities. Iowa Agricultural College reported the first home economics program in 1880 when a model kitchen was demonstrated at the Iowa State Fair.

## The Users

In the fifties, home economics programs emphasized Extension homemakers clubs with participants who had a mainly rural orientation. Now in the eighties, Extension programs cover topics of interest to a more diversified clientele in urban, suburban, and rural areas. Basically, Extension’s current priority audiences include people with varying needs:

- People with similar functional or special needs—low-income people, working women, handicapped people, single-parent households, ethnic minorities, and others.
- People in specific developmental processes of family life—youth, pregnant women, parents, young families and adults, senior citizens, and others.
- People who are both program recipients and teachers—volunteer leaders, aides, professionals of other public or private agencies, and traditional homemaker groups.

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## The Process

In all its teaching, Extension has followed the mandate of the Smith-Lever Act . . . “to aid in diffusing among the people of the United States useful and practical information on subjects relating to . . . home economics, and to encourage the application of the same.” The Cooperative Extension Services form a grassroots, informal, out-of-school educational system to carry out the mandate. Local staffs receive invaluable support from State specialists and researchers at their State land-grant universities and from USDA’s Science and Education Administration.

One Extension tradition is the training of volunteer leaders. These volunteers teach millions of adults and youth. They are trained by Extension home economists.

Educational programs are based on needs identified at local, State, and national levels. Extension staffs work closely with other government agencies to make the most of available resources and to avoid duplicating efforts.





## The Staff

Staffs at all three levels—local, State and Federal—make up the Cooperative Extension home economics educational system.

- Extension's nearly 4,000 local home economists are all professionally trained and experienced educators.
- About 900,000 Extension-trained volunteers, including 600,000 volunteer Extension homemakers who are members of the National Extension Homemakers Council (NEHC), make up the volunteer Extension team. NEHC has been closely associated with Extension since 1936. The volunteers extend Extension's educational programs to millions of individuals and families who would not otherwise be reached. At least 150,000 volunteers trained by Extension home economists teach 4-H youth.
- About 5,000 paraprofessional aides are employed to teach low-income homemakers how to improve their families' diets in Extension's Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP).
- Over 1,000 State Extension administrative staff and home economics specialists provide support to local staffs. Most specialists have master's or doctor's degrees in such fields as nutrition, housing, family resource management, home furnishings, textiles and clothing, and human development.
- At the Federal level, program leaders and specialists in family education and food and nutrition provide leadership and assistance to State home economics staffs.

## The Programs

Major Extension programs in home economics are—

**Housing, home furnishings, and surroundings.** This program's main emphases are energy conservation, repair and maintenance of housing and furnishings, purchase plans, building, and remodeling.

**Food and nutrition.** Relationships between diet and health; food selection, preparation, and storage; home food preservation and principles of food safety; and the influence of environmental factors on food-related human behavior are emphasized.

**Household textiles and clothing.** Planning to meet clothing needs; purchasing, construction, and remodeling skills; care practices; and adapting clothing for the elderly and handicapped are priority topics.

**Family economics and management.** Lifelong financial management, managing resources, increasing consumer competence in the marketplace, and participation in public affairs are emphasized.

**Family relationships and child development.** Strengthening families and individuals by increasing living skills, maximizing the personal development of each family member from birth through the aging process, and developing problemsolving abilities are major topics.

**Health and safety.** Health promotion (stay-well programs) and accident prevention are priority topics.

## The Methods

Extension home economics educators use a variety of methods to provide educational programs and deliver information to consumers. Some examples are—

- Mass media.
- Group meetings.
- Personal contacts.
- Correspondence courses.
- Shopping mall programs and exhibits.
- Newsletters.
- Computer-assisted instruction.
- Taped telephone messages and consumer call-in services.
- Publications and fact sheets.



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## The Results

Inflation and energy conservation are two of today's important national concerns. Extension educators all over the country are conducting educational programs for consumers in these areas. Here are a few brief examples of these efforts:

- Over 15,000 Florida residents took a study-at-home series of money management lessons last year. About 90 percent said the course was beneficial.

About half of the States now offer correspondence courses in money management to energy-conscious consumers, many of whom have little time or gas to travel to meetings.

- Mississippi's successful money management consultation center in a shopping mall in Jackson reaches millions of residents with information. One-to-one counseling, Extension-trained community leaders, and mass media are the techniques employed. Other money management consultation centers are being established in other parts of the State. Other States are trying similar ideas.

- Free computer analyses have been made available to 3,000 Kentucky residents through the Computer Home Energy Analysis Program (CHEAP). It is provided by Kentucky's Cooperative Extension Service and Department of Energy. Homeowners can find out the economic feasibility of adding insulation, storm windows and doors, and so forth. Thirty percent of the homeowners have added insulation as a result of CHEAP. Through CHEAP and related energy education efforts, about 1.1 million Kentucky households have been reached with energy information.

- In another approach, the Comprehensive Education and Training Act (CETA) program and Massachusetts' Cooperative Extension Service provided funds for the Energy Conservation Analysis Project (ECAP) to offer homeowners free energy audits conducted by CETA aides. So far, over 6,000 audits have been completed. Total annual potential savings for 3,000 homes

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audited in 1978 and 1979 is more than \$1,030,000. Within 2 months after 3,500 Massachusetts energy audits, 65 percent of the homeowners took significant actions. Another third of the homeowners had plans to take action.

For information about other current State or local Extension home economics programs, contact the State leader of home economics at your State land-grant university. Or call your local Cooperative Extension Service office (listed under county or city government in the white pages of your telephone directory).

## **For More Information**

Contact Family Education or Food and Nutrition, SEA-Extension, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

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